

Orphanage teaches responsibility through agriculture

LA LIMA, Honduras — For the students at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (Our Little Brothers and Sisters), an orphanage in Francisco Morazán, getting sent to the farm to work was considered a punishment. Today, students are eager to get to the farm to tend to their personal crop rows and apply high-tech farming techniques that Fintrac is teaching them through USAID's Rural Economic Diversification (RED) program.

Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos started receiving technical assistance and training in December 2006 as part of Fintrac's school alliance program, and is one of 12 participating schools.

The 600 students at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos are orphans, ranging from five months old to 28 years old. Many of these orphans are finding new opportunities in agriculture because of their exposure to horticulture production at the school's farm, which has become a Fintrac model farm serving as an example and training center for other farmers. The farm includes cucumber, bell pepper, carrot, green bean, lettuce and tomato production.

The students are not just learning about agriculture. Their work on the farm is contributing to the school with profits earned from local market sales that go toward further expansion of agricultural production and school improvements. After Fintrac advised the school to diversify production and use improved farming techniques, the cafeteria at the school has all the fresh vegetables it needs to feed the students.

"We're giving the cafeteria better produce than we can get at the market," said the school's Agriculture Program Coordinator Oscar Cruz.

In addition, the school's monthly income from agriculture increased from an average of \$526 to \$2,105.

Cruz credits Fintrac's work implementing USAID-RED for the farm's success.

"The project's technical assistance and vision that [Fintrac technician] Marco Nunez has was instrumental," Cruz said.

He is also quick to credit the students for their enthusiasm and the school's management for helping contribute and allow for the farm's expansion since starting with Fintrac.

The school uses Fintrac's complete technical package including crop rotation, calendarization, improved seeds, raised beds, and drip irrigation on 1.7 hectares and plans are in the works for expansion. Since the school started with the program, they have tripled area designated for high-value horticulture production.

Fintrac jumpstarts the schools in its alliance program with technical assistance, equipment donations, and in-kind contributions.



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Students at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos Ever Nahun Andrade, left, and Alvaro Alvarado Gonzalez, right, are in charge of the school's greenhouse and Maria Teresa Saravia is in charge of the nursery.

"We're giving the cafeteria better produce than we can get at the market."
— Oscar Cruz, Agriculture Program Coordinator at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos

The greenhouse is managed by two students, Ever Nahun Andrade, 17, and Alvaro Alvarado Gonzalez, 23.

Andrade had problems at home and was admitted to Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos for protection. He discovered an interest in agriculture and enjoys working with the school's younger children.

"That's how the cycle continues, passing on our experiences from old to young," Andrade said.

Gonzalez is helping out in the greenhouse to earn a scholarship to start school next year at an agricultural university in Catacamas.

Agriculture is one of the trade programs the school offers as part of the complete education they receive. Younger children in the program receive training from the older students and manage their own crop row.

"The kids learn responsibility," Cruz said.

The students have to give half their yields to the school and can choose what to do with the other half. Some trade it with other students for necessities and others sell their produce to the school's employees.

Maria Teresa Saravia, 16, found her niche in the school's agriculture program. She tends to the school's nursery and is responsible for supplying the farm with plantlets. She says because she's a woman she's better than the boys would be in the nursery.

"It's delicate work. It requires patience that the boys don't have," Saravia said.

The school is a model farm and serves as a training center for other Fintrac farmers. The school plans to open a vegetable stand, offer the students' services as technicians for other farmers in the area, and help other schools adopt similar agriculture systems.

Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos is a charitable organization with similar schools in Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Peru and the Dominican Republic. More than 15,000 children have benefited from the organization's support and 2,800 are currently enrolled worldwide.

The school provides students a home, an education, and trade skills. Students can also earn scholarships to attain higher education and many pursue agricultural studies.

Fintrac launched the school alliance program as part of USAID-RED to increase the overall availability of qualified farm technicians in Honduras and expose more young people to modern agriculture technology. The school alliance program works with 12 schools reaching more than 900 students.

USAID-RED is a three-year program designed to increase rural incomes and employment opportunities in Honduras. It is providing support to 742 lead clients and more than 10,000 beneficiaries. By July 2008, the program expects to generate \$30 million in new sales by lead clients.



A student's row is marked with his name. Younger students at the school are responsible for taking care of their own row and deciding what to do with the harvests.

Agriculture Coordinator Oscar Cruz, left, inspects the greenhouse.



Andrade, left, and Gonzalez, tend to lettuce plants.